

23: Franck--335

116, 224, 411

T-2

(1924) 1926

Laotians

Ethnic subgroup

"On the swift slope we passed an old man and a boy [EJ: of the Kha group] with a crossbow and some pencil-like arrows, who were evidently stalking birds, for all the rain."

25: Brodrick--101 [3]

S-3

(1939) 1948

Laotians

116, 181, 224, 276

"The men and the women both smoke and often they smoke pan, a sort of hemp, not unlike the Moroccan kif, but the Laotians mix their pan with tobacco. And everyone chews betel.

The Laotians' ideal in life is to chew betel, to drink rice-alcohol, to make love and to sleep--they are very good sleepers. Their economy is still half pre-agricultural, hunting and fishing afford food and amusement, and amusement, of course, because men are not wholly dependent upon the product of the chase."

"Nowhere in the Laos is the big-game shooting as good or as exciting as in Cambodia or in Annam. It is forbidden throughout the Laos to shoot elephant except in self-defence and the rhinoceros is as rare as in any other part of Indo-China. The Chinese have, for centuries past, imported vast quantities of rhinoceros horn for medicine and for carving into those rhinoceros horn cups now so sought after by collectors. No cups have been fashioned now for a century or more and, indeed, many are broken up and ground down to supply the demand for tonics, aphrodisiacs and antidotes among the Chinese. But in Mouhot's time, not a century ago, rhinoceros was fairly common in all the region between the Mekong [HD: in Luang Prabang province] and the Annam Range, and the old traveller whose body lies buried in the jungle not far from Luang-Prabang, tells a vivid tale of his hunting:

'We were eight men, all armed with guns. Mine was fitted with a sharp bayonet. The Laotians carried only iron javelin-blades mounted on strong bamboo sticks, but their chief had a long, sharp [108] sword, not heavy, but very supple and almost unbreakable. After about two miles march through the forest, we heard the branches crackle and the dry leaves rustle. Motioning us to slow down and to hold ourselves ready, the chief strode forward. Soon we heard a piercing cry. It was the chief's signal that the beast was not far off. Then the chief began striking two bamboo rods together while his men shouted so as to force the rhinoceros from his lair. A few

minutes later, the animal, furious at being disturbed in his retreat, came straight at us. He was a very large male. With no sign of fear, but as joyful as though he were sure of his victory, the intrepid hunter advanced towards the monster and, with poised lance defiant, awaited the onrush. The animal charged straight forwards, his mouth wide open and alternately raising and lowering his head. Just as he came within range, the man flung his javelin, from a distance of about five feet, into the beast's mouth. Then, he left the weapon in place and walked back to us. We remained at a respectful distance in order to watch the rhinoceros's death-agony without danger to ourselves. He gave out the most terrifying roars and rolled on his back in dreadful convulsions while our men shouted for joy. A few minutes later, as the beast was vomiting streams of blood, we were able to approach him. I then shook hands with the chief and complimented him upon his skill and courage. He replied that I alone had the right to finish off the quarry and this I did by ramming my long bayonet into its throat. The chief, having jerked his javelin from out the body of Behemoth, offered the weapon to me and asked me to accept it as a souvenir. I gave him in exchange a magnificent European dagger. "

643* Khamone-Noi seems to have been a most unusual man, and it
157 is to be regretted that we cannot paint a more precise picture of
175* him. Brought up at first as an exile in Vientiane, far from his
native land, then the companion of Souligna's grandsons in their
peregrinations, and finally king of Luang-Prabang which he had to
leave in order to combat the Burmese and mount the throne of
Xieng-Mai, this wandering prince experienced a thousand adventures
which he faced with equanimity, manifesting on all occasions, both
good and bad, a surprisingly philosophical humor and a most un-
usual carefreeness. He had one passion, hunting, to which he de-
voted all his time and which gained him the surname "Ong-Nok,"
the /185/ prince of the birds (unless it meant the prince who was
"always out").

669 Intha-Som's bold stroke (1727). One day in 1727 when he was
643* away from Luang-Prabang and, as the Annals say, in the company
175* of Phya-Keo, Thai-Sang, Chabane, Thao-Bang-Khom and Thao-
Bang-Houak, Intha-Som suddenly closed the gates of the city and
occupied the palace. The maneuver was not accomplished with-
out some disturbance, and on the way back Khamone-Noi had wind
of some kind of treachery. He sent Thao-bang-Houak up to the ap-
proaches of the capital to find out what was going on. When he
learned of the defection of all those in whom he had placed his
confidence he halted, bewildered, and broke a gold carafe which
he was holding in his hands. Then, as if ashamed of a gesture of
anger which he had not been able to repress, he turned on his heel,
leaving his companions free to follow him or not as they wished,
and set out calmly in the direction of Xieng-Mai where new destinies
awaited him.

This is how tradition relates the last part of this odd man's life:

643* Odyssey of Khamone-Noi. "The inhabitants of Luang-Prabang
175* had grown tired of seeing /186/ their king always absent from the
palace and neglecting the management of their affairs. One day
as he was returning from a long outing he was surprised to find the
gates of his palace solidly closed. The people whom he met
avoided him or fled when he approached. Some children who had
gathered round and who were looking at him curiously said to him:
'You are never there, the leaders and the people are not satisfied,
they have closed the gates of your palace so that you can leave it.'
Then Khamone-Noi went away sadly, entered the pagoda of

133 The market of Bassac owes its importance to the proximity of the
433 plateau. It is therefore a storehouse for the Laotians of the whole
438 region, a reservoir [51] from which they draw. The part which it
plays is obviously a fine one, and no more can be asked of it.

There has also been much discussion as to whether large-scale breeding of buffalo and oxen would be successful there, for at present livestock is found only in the villages situated near the Sédone, that is to say, quite far from the plateau. The question has not yet been settled, and sufficient tests have not yet been made.

133 At the southernmost corner of the plateau there is a conical mountain about 800 meters in altitude which Francis Garnier baptized The Breast [le Téton] because of its shape, and to which he later gave the name Lagrée's Peak [Pic de Lagrée] in commemoration of the President of the Exploratory Commission of 1866.

• [224] The elephant hunters of southern Laos go to the mountainous region of Saravane and Attoupeu every year, and there they capture an annual quota of fifty to a hundred elephants.

133 To the east of Attoupeu the mountains are inhabited by well-nigh independent Kha tribes--Cédango, Djarais, Rognaos and Bahnars. The two latter tribes have almost been pacified, thanks to the persevering efforts of the Christian missionaries of Kon-Toum.
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[797] This point is the center of the mission, and through it passes the road from Attoupeu to Qui-Nhon. It crosses the Annamitic Chain between Kon-Xalam and Kon-Tlorak at an altitude of about 900
563 meters. Near Attoupeu this same road goes up over Pou-Satièng (400 meters), the last ramification of the great chain, which separates the basin of the Sé-Souk from that of the Sé-Kémane.

[135] This region of Pou-Satièng, Sé-Souk and Sé-Kémane has long been known to be rich in gold deposits.

§ IV--HYDROLOGY

a. --THE MÉKONG--GENERALITIES

133 It has often been said, and rightly so, that the Nile constituted Egypt. In the same way it can be said that the Mékong makes Laos, for is it not the river which gives what vitality there is to these vast isolated regions? Is it not the river which, by its annual floods, helps the growth of rice? Does it not supply, with its fish, a large

Hill Tribes

595 There is polygamy among the Meos, and the Meo women do not enjoy any higher regard than the Kha women.

[10] The Yaos. The Yaos have the same origin as the Meos, and are strikingly like them in many respects. Their mores, their beliefs and their habits are identical.

619 As we have seen above, the Yaos are divided into three varieties, these being the Lantenes, the Khao and the Ao-Tchaine.

291 The Lantenes (blacks) wear broad trousers, a long smock buttoning at the side and a turban, all made of black cottonstuff. They wear 302 their hair long and either wound under a turban or braided in Chinese style.

[342] Their houses are like those of the Meos and shelter several families, each of which has its own quarters. They are generally clean and well kept-up.

593 The mores of the Lantene Yaos are patriarchal, and these folk are monogamous. The women are very reserved and do not let them- 562 selves be seen much by strangers. They enjoy a certain respect and are treated with consideration by their husbands.

231 The Lantenes are great livestock breeders, and cultivate the opium poppy in addition to rice and maize. They are skilled hunters of wild 241 animals, and each man owns a rifle from which he is rarely separated.

224 Besides a dialect peculiar to them, they speak Quoan-hoa (a 212 Cantonese idiom), and many of them can write Chinese characters.

[198] The Khao Yaos are less outgoing than their fellows and do not 101 greet strangers with as much good will.

291 The men's clothing is like that of the Lantenes, [269] but the women are garbed in a different manner and wear their hair in a special way which has earned their tribe the name "Khao" (horns).

Over a pair of black trousers ornamented with colored embroidery and held in place by leggings, Khao Yao women wear a tunic which comes down to the knees but the flaps of which are fastened to the belt. This tunic also has colored embroidery on the chest, back, neck and cuffs, and is held shut with wide silver hooks.

302 Their hairdress consists of a coil which is smeared with wax and lacquer to hold it in place and in which a wooden socket is imbedded. A light bamboo framework is inserted into the socket, and over this is spread a red cloth or a black cloth embroidered in red. The women thus appear to have two horns on their head.

301 Silver jewelry, neckbands, bracelets and ear pendants are worn by the Khao Yaos.

Hunting

224 Hunting, for the inhabitants of Laos, is another form of scavenging, since it procures them either live animals or the remains of the same without any great labor or expense.

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224 For the Laotian, time does not count. He makes his powder himself, and with the exception of firearms his hunting devices are also of his own fabrication. With the help of this far from perfect equipment he is nevertheless able to capture live elephants and to procure the ivory and remains of those which he kills, as well as the hide, talons, bones and horns of a multitude of other animals. All these products are so many trade commodities for him. The flesh of all these animals, moreover, makes a sizeable contribution to the diet of the Laotian hunter. It is a feast for him, for his family and for his entourage.

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[825]
224 [344] The natives have a perfect knowledge of the habits and customs of all the representatives of the local fauna. Patient, adroit, endowed with excellent powers of hearing and sight which are further developed and sharpened by practice, they are not afraid to attack the tiger and other large animals despite their rudimentary weapons.

Lying hidden for hours at a time, motionless and silent and abstaining from smoking, the hunter waits for his victim without losing his self-control. When it approaches within a few meters of him, his sure eye and untrembling arm enable him to strike it dead with a bullet or with a poisoned arrow shot from a powerful crossbow.

One is astounded at the results achieved with weapons which are so imperfect, as much by their rudimentary construction as by their age, and which often lead one to fear more for the hunter's life than for the beast's. We must admire these men who, although reputed to be cowardly, brave danger with such primitive weapons and go in search of wild animals in their very lairs, killing them at almost point-blank range so that oftentimes the wad from the gun singes the animal's fur or the arrow goes in one side and out the other.

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439 The firearms used by the Laotians are flintlock or muzzle-loading rifles, some of which are of Siamese or Burmese manufacture. Others are imported from Europe through trade or in private cargoes. There are also old regulation rifles, British and others, chiefly those which bear the image of a cock and the word "Tower" stamped on the lock or breech.

The Laotian, as we have said before, makes his powder himself. 411
He also casts his bullets, which are usually only shapeless masses of lead or iron. In view of this fact it is not surprising, with such ammunition, that his guns do not have even a medium range. He is therefore forced to shoot from a very short distance, often less than five meters, if he wants not merely to hit his prey but to strike it in the right place so as to fell it on the spot and not risk becoming the victim of a wounded beast.

[345] European weapons tempt him because of their careful construction and long range, but if by chance he does try them they do not yield the same results in his hands as his own do, imperfect as they are. Thus he prefers his own weapons to ours, finding them better adapted to his eye and his arm.

For several years now, however, double-barreled hunting rifles of an inferior quality and Winchester muskets of the already outdated 1878 model have been imported into Laos through Siam and Burma. The careful maintenance which such weapons require, the high price of ammunition and the difficulty of obtaining new supplies are all reasons preventing their widespread use. Thus they are, so to speak, only luxury items possessed by a few fortunate Laotians who have acquired them out of ostentation rather than for use. [439] [554]

Firearms and crossbows are not the only hunting devices used in Laos. Indeed, there is no lack of ingenious instruments, some simple and some complicated, but always perfectly adapted to the particular purpose to which they are destined. They are made with perfect artistry and care, with a view towards capturing the most diverse forms of wild life, from the largest pachyderms such as the elephant down to the smallest bird. Traps, deadfalls, snares, springes, nets, birdcalls, etc., complete the Laotians' hunting equipment. All these devices are manufactured by them during the rainy season, when they are confined to their houses. They are like our peasants who profit from the long winter evenings to make all the little things which they will need during the course of the year.

Rifles and crossbows are used only in hunting the larger wild animals. The natives use special methods to capture elephants.

This pachyderm once lived in great herds in all the parts of Laos which offered grassy plains, valleys and high plateaus, especially where certain varieties of bamboo, wild banana trees and graminaceous plants which were to its taste grew. Nowadays, because 224

224 this animal has been hunted to excess and because of [346] the value of ivory, it has disappeared from certain regions. It is scarcely ever found now except in the valleys of the Sesane, the Se-Ia-Drang and the Srepok and in the Muong of Maha-Say in Lower Laos, and in Vientiane, Tran-Ninh, the Hua-Pahn, the Sib-Song-Chau-Thai, etc., in Upper Laos.

313 For the last ten years or so the working of the teak forests in the Siamese and Shan territories of the basin of the Upper Menam (1) has

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438 (1) Elephants are used in Siam to carry teak logs from the place where they are felled to nearby watercourses.

necessitated the use of an ever-increasing number of these pachyderms, among which overwork and accidents claim many victims. Thus to fill the gaps elephants have to be sought where there are still some left, and it is precisely in French Laos, on the left bank of the Mekong, that a few wild herds are still found.

Since there is no shortage of buyers, it is to the interest of the hunters to capture as many of these valuable animals each year as possible and to train them with a view towards selling them. Since demand even greatly exceeds supply, an inflationary tendency has resulted which has caused prices to rise by sixty to eighty percent. Besides the sum paid to the sellers, the purchasers have to pay an exit duty amounting to half of the purchase price. This tax, like other similar ones of which we shall speak later on, is levied to compensate for the real estate tax which Laos does not yet have.

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231 The methods now used to capture wild elephants are identical, except for minor details, in all parts of Laos. In order to summarize them and to provide a description of an elephant hunt, we shall have recourse to the interesting account which Captain Gosselin (2) has given.

(2) *Le Laos et le Protectorat français*, op. cit. [Paris, 1900.]

"At the beginning of the dry season, the owners of tame elephants make ready for the great beats which take place in the mountains near the Annam frontier. They train their elephants to run, so that they will develop speed, and manufacture immense ropes forty to fifty meters long, made from strands of buffalo hide [347] and rattan and strengthened with copper wire. A collar is fitted at one end of each rope which is large enough to be put around an elephant's neck, while a ring about sixty centimeters in diameter is fitted to the other end.

● 224 The rings and collars are made of the same materials as the ropes themselves.

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"Towards the middle of November, a caravan composed of some ten of the largest elephants in the Muong leaves Mahasay. Each elephant bears two men, one of whom will be the carnic and the other the hunter. Many men follow the caravan on foot, some to keep it supplied with provisions and the others solely for their own pleasure...

"...As soon as the moon begins to appear above the trees the whole caravan sets out, the hunters following one another in single file. When confronted with a herd of wild elephants the whole troop falls on them, and the talent of the hunters then consists in separating a fairly young elephant, and one which seems a likely prospect for training, from its companions. The trained eye of the Laotian is very rarely deceived. Two hunters with trusty mounts then take charge of it, while the others hold off the enemy with trunk and tusk blows. Battle is often not necessary, and the attacked elephants which have been taken by surprise during a moment of repose think only of fleeing from their adversaries.

"It is then that speed is indispensable for the two elephants pursuing the chosen young one. When they have succeeded in placing it between the two of them, each hunter tries, by means of his pole, to pass the ring around its foot so as to impede its progress. The hunter who succeeds in achieving this difficult maneuver is the true vanquisher, for when this initial goal has been reached there is less danger involved in placing a second ring, and then the elephant is a captive. It utters cries and rolls on the ground, but to no avail, for its two adversaries use their strength to hold it. Overcome by fatigue, the prisoner finally stands up. The ropes holding it are fastened to trees, and with the help of several tame elephants which unite their efforts a leather collar which has previously been attached to large trees with ropes is fastened around its neck. Then only can the rings placed on its feet during the chase be removed. The captive is left thus for two days, without any food, so as to lose part of its strength. Only on the third day is it allowed to eat, and then the hunt begins again and continues in this fashion for two or three months. The elephants taken prisoner are led to the village by the tame elephants, and their training exercises are begun immediately."

The purpose of this special training is to subject the elephants to the will of its carnic, and then to accustom it to bearing burdens. It takes [348] about six months to tame a wild elephant and bring it to a point where it is perfectly docile.